



Congresswoman Stephanie Murphy
Remarks Prepared for Delivery
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Thank you to Women Inspiring Change and Community Development for having me today. I am delighted to help you kick off this incredible symposium dedicated to the empowerment and celebration of women.

First of all, let me say that I am grateful to see that so many of you showed up today despite having just experienced Hurricane Irma. This past week has truly been challenging for our state. If you are here today, I am hopeful that your family members and your homes survived the hurricane relatively unscathed. Unfortunately, many others across the state were not so fortunate, and millions of people are still without power. Please continue to keep these families in your thoughts and prayers.

I'd like to discuss with you today why it's important for us to recognize the importance of sisterhood and how we are paving the way for future generations of strong women and girls. Let me start by sharing a story with you about my 3-year-old daughter, Maya.

My husband and I noticed that somehow our daughter developed a bad habit of responding to questions or comments from others with a curt, "Whatchu say?" We have been trying to teach her that this response is impolite. And so I said to my daughter, "Maya, next time you need to say something like: 'I didn't hear you, can you please repeat what you said?'"

Fast forward a few days later, and my husband and I are sitting in our living room watching the news unfold from Charlottesville. We are completely stunned. A white supremacist had mowed down several protesters with his car, resulting in the death of one woman. And I was just livid about it! Expletive after expletive just came spewing out of my mouth.

"It's mother-effing 2017," "What the eff," and all kinds of other colorful words...

And it all would have been good and fine in that moment for me to unleash my anger, ...save for the fact that it was the middle of August and my kids were very much home on summer break. I immediately stopped myself as soon as I had realized my kids were just right upstairs, but it was, of course, too late.

Maya's head peeked out in between the railings up the top of the stairs and... you guessed it... my three-year-old daughter says to me: "Mama... I didn't hear you. Can you please repeat what you said?"

This all served to remind me that our words matter and that we should not take for granted that younger generations of girls and women look up to us and are counting on us to pave the way. That is true sisterhood. And it's, in part, why I decided to run for office.

The power of words and wanting to set a positive example for my daughter are two big reasons that I decided to get involved in politics.

I must admit that running for office never crossed my mind. Congress isn't exactly anybody's favorite institution. But, that all changed last year during the presidential campaign. You couldn't turn on the TV or read the news without coming across abundant coverage of hateful rhetoric and blatant sexism. I became increasingly concerned that this kind of language was becoming normalized in our society, and that this would be the kind of twisted culture that my children would grow accustomed to.

And then, the Pulse Nightclub shooting happened and sent shockwaves throughout my community in Orlando. I couldn't rack my brain to understand why someone would take 49 innocent lives. That's when I realized that we couldn't go on spewing the kind of hateful rhetoric that was running rampant in the media – and from the mouths of some politicians themselves -- and expect it not to manifest itself in violent ways.

Frustrated by our leaders' refusal to respond, I realized that if you want to change Washington, you've got to change the leaders you send to Washington. So, I decided to run for office and be the change that I wanted to see in the world for my children.

The odds were against me. But to my surprise, hundreds of people showed up to volunteer for my race—including armies of women of all ages. I realized that they, too, had grown frustrated and weary of what they were seeing.

The campaign was tough. As expected, I faced all kinds of criticism from people who belittled my experiences. For example, despite my experience as a national security specialist under two Secretaries of Defense and my years working in the private sector, I was told that I was unqualified. I was even called a "nothingburger." But I tried to tune it all out and remember why I was running and who I was doing it for.

And after just a four-month campaign against a popular 24-year incumbent... I think you know how it all turned out. This "nothingburger" won.

Today, I am about nine months into my first term in office and I am doing my best to hold true to the values that brought me here. Of course, the same sort of negativity that I faced on the campaign followed me to Washington. Instead of getting swept up in the hyper-partisanship of Capitol Hill and general Tweets of the day, I've focused on three key areas: jobs, security, and equality.

As a member of the House Small Business Committee, I'm working with both sides to support our nation's entrepreneurs and small businesses—which are the backbone of our economy.

Gridlock and dysfunction are preventing any real change in Washington. When I was in the private sector, you had to work with all kinds of people – people from different backgrounds and political parties, and, yes, even people you didn't like.

In the private sector, if you refuse to work with your co-workers, you get fired. So, my approach to Congress has been focused on results – not party politics – and working with both parties to grow the economy for everyone.

We need an economy that works for all of us. At the center of our economy should be a robust middle class – where all children grow up in safe, state-of-the-art schools; where college is affordable and workers are paid a livable wage; where every family has access to quality, affordable health care; and where seniors are guaranteed their benefits after a lifetime of hard work.

On a personal level, my husband is a small business owner. And, as some of you may know, if you're married to an entrepreneur, it's a family affair. It's all hands on deck. He runs an athletic apparel small business. At some point, I even found myself designing women's apparel for him. As a woman in business, I've also long viewed it as my responsibility to help other aspiring women business leaders.

Before coming to Congress, I spent time doing pro-bono mentoring work with a group called ATHENA Powerlink to help women get to that next level and break through the million-dollar mark of capital. It was some of the most rewarding work that I got to do. This was the embodiment of what sisterhood is about: Women helping one another break barriers in a male-dominated environment. I realized how difficult it can be for women entrepreneurs to access the financial capital and networks needed to get their businesses off the ground.

Here are some facts about women in business: The number of women-owned small firms has grown by 45 percent over the last decade. Across the country, women are the majority-owners of about 11.3 million small businesses that employ nearly 9 million people and generate about \$1.6 trillion in revenues.

This is phenomenal. But we're not quite where we need to be.

Women-owned firms are still in the minority, comprising just about 38 percent of all small businesses. And for every two male entrepreneurs in this country, there is one female entrepreneur. To address this disparity, I've been working to advance initiatives in Congress to increase access to capital for every small business owner.

I even passed my first bill in the House recently. The bill, entitled the *Microloan Modernization Act*, will make improvements to the U.S. Small Business Administration's Microloan program. This program provides short-term loans of up to \$50,000 to small businesses. And while anyone can apply, the Microloan program places particular emphasis on assisting women and minority

entrepreneurs who—as you know—typically have a harder time qualifying for conventional loans and venture capital.

I also recently passed a measure to increase funding for Women’s Business Centers—a network of about 150 educational centers across the country that are designed to provide technical assistance and counseling for women in business in the areas of contracting, lending, financial management, business strategy, and more. And, finally, one of the first bills I helped introduce that became law directs the National Science Foundation and NASA to support aspiring women entrepreneurs and focus on encouraging more girls to go into STEM fields.

Breaking down the barriers for women in business doesn’t just help women – it helps families. When a partner in the family is able to boost their income, that boost benefits the entire family. And, a rising tide lifts all boats. So, I don’t view these issues as solely women’s issues; they’re family issues.

In addition to jobs, I’m also focused on security. As a former national security specialist at the Department of Defense, I care deeply about defending our great country. I am proud to serve on the powerful House Armed Services Committee, where I am working to ensure that our service members have the resources and training they need to keep our country safe. I am also working to provide our military families and veterans with the full support they deserve.

And, when we talk about security, we’ve got to talk about our own security at home and at school, which means we’ve got to end the gun violence epidemic in this country. This issue is important to women, as much of the gun violence in America is driven by domestic violence. More than half of women murdered with guns in the U.S. in 2011 — at least 53 percent — were killed by intimate partners or family members.

According to Everytown USA, guns make it more likely that domestic abuse will turn into murder. When a gun is present in a domestic violence situation, it increases the risk of homicide for women by 500 percent. But, to solve this crisis, we first need the facts – not politics and not scare tactics. COLD. HARD. FACTS.

That’s why I’m leading the fight to repeal the Dickey Amendment, which would finally allow the federal government to research the causes and find solutions to reduce gun violence in America.

With preschool children facing lockdowns to deal with potential shooters and innocent people fearing another mass shooting like the one at Pulse, I am fed up with politicians putting politics ahead of solutions – and I won’t back down from this fight.

We’ve talked about jobs. We’ve talked about security. Now, let’s talk about equality.

While women make up almost half of the American workforce, we are still paid about 80 cents on the dollar in most industries. Discrimination is still a factor. And it’s why I helped introduce the *Paycheck Fairness Act*, comprehensive legislation that would help to alleviate the issue. But, it isn’t the only factor. Of course, we still need to be better at advocating for ourselves and asking

for what we know we deserve. Studies also show that the gender pay gap disproportionately affects middle-class families in which parents must take time off from work to have a family.

This is why I also support advancing a national paid leave policy, so that both men and women can take adequate time off after having a child without worrying about whether their jobs will still be there when they get back.

Additionally, I'm working to bring down the astounding cost of child care. This is a no-brainer to me. If we believe in family values in this country, then it is past time we value families.

Child care is especially expensive for Floridian families, where only about 30 percent of families can afford it. On average, Floridian families spend about \$8,700, or nearly twice as much per year as in-state tuition. Child care costs are increasingly taking over a significant portion of a family's budget, to the point that parents sometimes opt to leave their jobs or cut back on hours to care for their kids. And guess what? That burden often falls on the mother.

This is why I am working with Congressman Kevin Yoder, a Republican from Kansas, to advance a bipartisan bill entitled the *Promoting Access to Childcare for Everyone Act*. Essentially, we are making the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit refundable, which will be most beneficial to families that have little or no income tax liability, putting more money back into the pockets of struggling families.

Finally, I'm also proud to be a part of the LGBTQ Equality Caucus to fight for bills like the *Equality Act*. And, at a time when women's health care is under attack, I'm fighting tooth-and-nail to defend the rights of women to make their own health care and family planning decisions free from government intrusion – especially trying to stop attempts to defund Planned Parenthood.

As I conclude today, let me end by summarizing what my experience thus far in Congress has taught me about what women need to do to thrive and survive.

Show Grace and Grit. Women are often underestimated, whether that's in business, in sports, or in politics. We often must work twice as hard as men to prove our worth. And while it may be easy for us to shy away from challenges and new opportunities because of it, my simple request to you is this: DON'T. Take that negative energy and channel it into something positive.

Find Common Ground (or what they call "bipartisanship" in my job). While you should never compromise your principles or your values, it is *possible* to make progress by finding common ground with someone you disagree with. In fact, my legislative accomplishments to date were made possible because I did that.

Don't Understate the Importance of Incrementalism and Pragmatism. Because of the way that our system is set up, accomplishing anything of importance is often about incremental progress and making smart and strategic decisions. And we should embrace that. The Women's Suffrage Movement didn't happen overnight. It started in Seneca Falls with a small group of abolitionist activists led by two women who wanted change. And the Civil Rights Movement required countless acts of courage taken over time—like a woman refusing to give up her seat on a bus, and

young men and women sitting with quiet dignity at a lunch counter, and thousands that marched from Selma to Montgomery. Things don't happen overnight. Making real progress requires persistence, passion, *and* patience.

Let me end with one last personal anecdote. I wear a ring on my right hand that I received from my husband on Election Night. He gave it to me before we knew what the outcome of my crazy four-month gambit at becoming a member of Congress would be. He said, "This is to commemorate the fact that you have the courage to try." And so I call it my Courage Ring.

It's a reminder to me that sometimes in life, it takes courage to stand up for what you believe in and fight for what you want. And so I want to give you all a "virtual Courage Ring" to continue to do what you are doing and pay it forward by supporting one another.

Thank you!